

Sole Proprietors' Interpersonal Communication Styles and Well-Being: Manipulation Tactics, Psychological Reactance, and Life Satisfaction

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Abstract

This study examined the interpersonal communication styles of sole proprietors and analyzed their relationship to well-being in comparison with individuals working in corporate organizations. A total of 350 adults responded to the following questionnaires: a scale of manipulation tactics used in daily life, the Psychological Reactance Scale, and the Life Satisfaction Scale. ANOVA indicated that sole proprietors used less “coercive manipulation” than supervisors, section chiefs, or department heads. ANOVA also revealed that both sole proprietors and department heads exhibited more “claims for freedom” than regular employees. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis demonstrated that the use of “deceptive manipulation” was associated positively with the life satisfaction of organizational managers, whereas the use of “frank manipulation” was associated positively with the life satisfaction of sole proprietors. This study also found that “frank manipulation” is desirable in work environments.

Keywords

Sole Proprietorship, Manipulation, Psychological Reactance, Well-Being, Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

1. Introduction

1.1. Diverse Work Styles in Today's Japanese Society

The concept of work styles in Japanese society has begun to change significantly due to the implementation of the Workplace Reform Act, advances in technology, and globalization [1]. Until now, Japanese society has been dominated by lifetime employment and a seniority-based system, but due to the economic downturn and

performance-based system, an increasing number of people are choosing diverse work styles, such as double work and freelance work, to enhance their own careers and market value [1]. Industrial and organizational psychology research to date has mainly focused on people working in corporate organizations and groups, and only a few studies have focused on the psychological aspects of sole proprietorships.

1.2. What Is a Sole Proprietor?

Sole proprietor is a term that refers to a person who operates a business as an individual without establishing a corporation, a classification that is defined by tax law. In contrast, freelance refers to a way of working as an individual undertaking work for various clients without an employment contract with a company or organization, and is a “way of working” rather than a classification under tax law. Self-employed refers to a person who does not belong to any other company or organization but operates a business on his/her own responsibility. The term “self-employed” tends to conjure up images of sole proprietors who run their own businesses, but cases in which a person establishes a corporation and becomes its manager are also self-employed in the broadest sense of the term. The range of business types is wide, from managers of restaurants and clinics to freelance engineers, writers, farmers, and others. In other words, all people who run their own businesses fall under the category of self-employed, including sole proprietors, business owners who have established a corporation to run their businesses, and people who have taken over the family business to run it.

In other words, self-employment is a generic term for “businesspersons who run their own businesses independently”. On the other hand, entrepreneurship literally means to start a business, or to start a new business on one’s own, and is generally used to refer to starting a new business after becoming independent. However, the business to be launched in such cases is not restricted to corporations such as companies, and the term “entrepreneurship” is also used when launching a business as a sole proprietor or freelancer [1]. Given this wide variety of terms associated with sole proprietorships, this study will broadly define a sole proprietor as “a person who runs a business without belonging to a company or organization”. I will also cover a wide range of previous research in the psychological field of interpersonal communication, mental health, and well-being related to freelancers, the self-employed, and entrepreneurs.

1.3. Interpersonal Communication in Psychology

Fukada [2] broadly classifies interpersonal communication into communication to express oneself (self-disclosure, self-presentation, self-assertion), communication to negotiate with others (e.g., acceptance request techniques), and communication to manipulate others (persuasion, command, prohibition, coercion, deception). The responses of the recipient to these approaches include positive acceptance, convincing acceptance, superficial acceptance, withholding of response, ignoring,

repulsion/resistance, and refusal [3]. In this study, I focus on manipulative communication with others and repulsion/resistance, which are assumed to have a particularly strong relationship with well-being in the workplace.

1) What Is Interpersonal Manipulation?

We often try to manipulate others in our daily lives. Kikawa and Imajo [4] defined manipulation as “the means used by individuals to make others do something according to their own intentions”, and found three factors: “coercion”, “deception”, and “frankness”. “Coercive manipulation” means applying pressure directly or indirectly in order to make the other person obey. “Deceptive manipulation” is to deceive the other party by concealing the true purpose or giving a false reason, or to play tricks to achieve a goal. “Frank manipulation” is a straightforward appeal to influence others and has been shown to be positively associated with life satisfaction [4]-[6].

2) Psychological Reactance

Just when you are about to start working on a task, your boss tells you to “get on with it”, and you instantly lose motivation. This phenomenon is called psychological reactance, and has been studied mainly in the field of social psychology. Although the word “rebellion” may sound exaggerated, psychological reactance theory explains it as a rebellion against the deprivation of one’s freedom. Humans have the desire to be free to choose and make their own decisions. However, when subjected to intrusive persuasion, we feel as if this freedom is being taken away from us, and so we stubbornly refuse [7] [8]. Psychological reactance (hereafter referred to as “reactance”) is defined as “the motivation to recover one’s freedom when it is violated” [7] [8].

In Japan, most studies are experimental (e.g., [9] [10]), but in other countries, the degree to which reactance is likely to occur, *i.e.*, reactance characteristics, is often studied, and there are three currents of reactance characteristics research: Merz [11], Hong & Page [12], and Dowd *et al.* Recently, Kikawa [13] re-examined the factor structure of the Hong scale and found two factors, “reactance for reactance” and “desire for freedom”. Dowd *et al.* [14] addressed resistance from clients to counselors in counseling situations and created the Therapeutic Reactance Scale (TRS), which consists of three subscales: “non-sympathy”, “insistence for freedom”, and “defiance”. Since this scale is not specific to counseling situations in terms of content, but rather mainly contains items related to reactance in daily life, this study focuses on the TRS (hereafter referred to as the reactance scale).

3) Interpersonal Communication in the Workplace

People in organizations attempt to exert diverse influences on their superiors, colleagues, and subordinates [15]. There are eight types of bargaining behaviors used by managers: explicit statements, humility, rational explanations, sanctions, exchange of benefits, communication with superiors, blocking, and collusion, with sanctions being used most frequently by superiors toward their subordinates [15]. Subordinates used influence strategies against their bosses, such as cajoling, reasonable persuasion, trading, insisting, appealing to upper management, and

coalitions [15]. However, there are only a few previous studies that have examined the psychological aspects of what interpersonal communication styles are used with respect to sole proprietors.

1.4. Well-Being in Psychology

Happiness is a concept that is difficult to objectively demonstrate because it is felt by the person concerned [16], but it is commonly recognized that “people who are living their ideal life are satisfied with their life”. According to Diener *et al.* [17], life satisfaction is defined as “being satisfied with one’s life and feeling positive emotions such as happiness, and not feeling negative emotions such as loneliness very much”, and it is the degree of being “satisfied”, “wonderful”, “important”, “close to ideal”, and “affirming (not wanting to change)” [18]. Happiness can be felt in very short moments of daily life, in a certain period of life, in a certain environment, or over a long period of one’s life. There are different types of happiness, such as job satisfaction, home life satisfaction, residential life satisfaction, and so on. In this study, I focus on life satisfaction, which is a subjective satisfaction.

1.5. Actual Situation, Personality Traits, and Human Networks of Sole Proprietors Revealed by Previous Studies and Surveys

1) Self-Employment as a New Work Style

According to Recruit Works Research Institute Inc. [19], a new type of self-employment, represented by SOHO, has been increasing in the U.S. since the 1970s, and women in particular are becoming more active in establishing their own businesses. In addition, more than half of the self-employed are not incorporated. In Japan, self-employment as a new work style has emerged with the evolution of IT. For example, freelance business associates are getting together to establish companies as a place to make the most of their individuality, double workers who work at different jobs at the same time, home workers as contractors, post-retirement work utilizing their past experience in corporate organizations, community-centered networks, internet-based forms of collaboration, voluntary organizations of the elderly, and so on.

2) Actual Conditions of Sole Proprietors and Freelancers

According to Mitsubishi Research Institute, Inc. [20], 60% of respondents chose the freelance work style because they “want to work in my own style of work”, and 40% chose “to have freedom in working hours and location”. Regarding satisfaction with the freelance work style, more than 70% of freelancers were satisfied with “working relationships”, “working environment (working hours, location, etc.)”, “balance with private life”, and “sense of achievement and fulfillment”. 60% of the freelancers answered “Low/unstable income” as a barrier to working, while the number of hours worked per day and the number of days worked per month varied. In addition, 80% of the respondents indicated that they would like to continue working as freelancers in the future.

Karatsu [21] categorized the various types of freelancers by latent class analysis

and found that Cluster 1 “Married women working short hours”, Cluster 2 “Men with stable income”, Cluster 3 “Senior men living alone with a couple”, Cluster 4 “Single men with general income”, Cluster 5 “Single people living alone with fixed income”, Cluster 6 “Single + Alpha Low Income and Family Support”, and Cluster 7 “High Income” were identified.

3) Characterization of Entrepreneurs by Personality Traits and Leadership

Kitanaka [22] conducted a questionnaire survey and interviews with 72 entrepreneurs. In response to a question about communication style (asking about their own coaching style), 55.5% described themselves as promoters (logical and persuasive), 23.4% as analyzers (start with data-based analysis when working on things), 21% as controllers (want things done his/her way, divide time, and get the job done in a short period of time), and none of the respondents were supporters (cooperative and willing to help). The results of the responses to questions measuring leadership behavior according to Misumi’s [23] PM theory showed that 49% of the respondents were PM-type, 33% were Pm-type, and 18% were pm-type.

4) Human Networks of Entrepreneurs

According to Matsuda [24], entrepreneurs are influenced by “family members” in the stage from pre-startup to the execution of the startup, and by “other entrepreneurs and managers” in the stage after the startup until the company makes a profit and goes public. In an interview survey conducted by Hiraizumi [25], “strong ties” mainly from close relatives were identified during the startup phase. This played a role in assisting business activities, providing funds, and providing emotional support. At turning points, such as when the business takes off, “weak ties” were identified, such as introductions to key persons by friends and acquaintances, and networking in business groups. By connecting with people with whom they had little contact, entrepreneurs were able to gain information about a world different from their own. The “weak ties” were found to include both patterns in which the entrepreneurs themselves jumped in and patterns in which customers and business partners jumped in.

1.6. Actual Conditions and Problems of Mental Health of Sole Proprietors Revealed in Previous Studies and Surveys

As mentioned above, surveys of sole proprietors report a high level of satisfaction with the way they work as freelancers. At the same time, however, there are many surveys and research studies that have identified problems with the well-being of sole proprietors.

1) Actual Conditions of Health and Safety of Sole Proprietors

According to a survey conducted by the Laboratory of Occupational Health Management at the University of Occupational and Environmental Health [26], sole proprietors slept fewer short hours (less than 6 hours) and had higher subjective views of health than those affiliated with organizations. However, sole proprietors were less likely to receive health examinations (including physical examinations), had lower health literacy, and were less likely to receive COVID-19 vaccina-

tion than those affiliated with organizations. However, differences were observed in the rate of health checkups among private employers, depending on the type of industry.

2) A Risk Management Perspective

Torres [27], who has been educating small business owners and sole proprietors in France about the importance of health issues, has warned about suicides among small business owners with serious psychological problems. He cites one of the causes as the fact that the image of the entrepreneur as described in business schools is heroic, and managers are unable to talk about their own suffering and problems because they have superimposed themselves on this image. Kaneko *et al.* [28] point out the urgent need to develop risk management systems for stress among so-called community health care providers, such as sole proprietors, who are not included in the scope of industrial health care. According to Podenko [29], who studied the psychological characteristics of emotional burnout among Ukrainian freelancers, the features were feeling cornered, self-dissatisfaction, and insufficient selective emotional responses, and the indicators of emotional alienation symptoms were also high.

3) Workerhood and Mental Health

Workerhood refers to a way of working that is highly dependent on employment, regardless of whether or not there is an employment relationship [30]. According to Kume *et al.* [30], the more independent self-employed workers with workerhood, the lower their hourly wages, the longer their workweek, the lower their subjective productivity, the lower their happiness, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction, and the more negative their mental health and work engagement. Even after controlling for past work experience and reasons for becoming independently self-employed as factors affecting independent self-employment performance, higher workerhood still had a negative impact on many performance variables. Finally, when business relationships were taken into account, the robustness of the negative effects of workaholism was also confirmed, with fixed business relationships having a positive effect on worker performance and abuse of a superior position by a business partner having a negative effect.

4) Dealing with Trouble with Business Partners

According to Mitsubishi Research Institute, Inc. [20], most of the sole proprietors who had experienced trouble with business partners were those who received work/work requests (outsourcing) from businesses. As for the reason for accepting the client's offer without negotiating, 40% of the respondents answered, "Because if I don't accept the offer, the deal will be terminated or reduced in the future, which will affect my freelance activities". 30% of the respondents answered, "Because if I don't accept the contract, the deal will not be concluded, which will have a significant impact on my freelance activities". In addition, less than half of the lone workers, who are independent contractors in construction occupations, are able to autonomously decide the conditions of their employment [30]. According to Shibata [31], the reason for the long working hours of lone workers is based

on the assumption of a non-equal relationship with the prime contractor and upper-level subcontractors. Even if there are days when they cannot work, such as when it rains, they are not allowed to extend the construction period, and competition with other employers and the fear that the next job may be cut off force them to accept jobs that require long working hours.

1.7. Communication Skills and Qualities Required of Sole Proprietors

As mentioned above, there is little previous research on the interpersonal communication styles used by sole proprietors. The word “entrepreneurship” is well known today and is often translated as “entrepreneurial spirit”, but it originally means “the ability to create innovative values and ideas without being bound by conventional wisdom”. Therefore, it is something that anyone in any line of work should have [32], and does not refer to qualities unique to those who start their own businesses. However, there are many websites that list the skills needed to be a successful sole proprietor, and Pathmake Holdings [1] lists communication skills, self-management skills, and the ability to think and act flexibly.

First of all, although sole proprietors have a strong image of working alone, in order to obtain work, they need to be able to explain things in an easy-to-understand manner and have the skills to sell themselves. In addition, in order to keep the work, they have obtained for as long as possible, they need to make an effort to maintain good relationships with their clients, and thus, first of all, they need to have good communication skills. Also, sole proprietors must decide the schedule and quantity of work entirely on their own. In addition, they need to know their own capacity correctly, as they often become customer need-centered and overwork themselves. Secondly, they need to have good self-management skills, as they need to take care of their own physical condition in order to perform high-quality work. Another characteristic of sole proprietorships is that the nature of their work changes depending on the projects they take on from their clients, and they must be able to respond flexibly and without fear of change. In order to advance further as a sole proprietor, it is not enough to simply wait for instructions from clients, but it is also necessary to be proactive in improving the work. According to Blyth *et al.* [33], there are five self-branding strategies for online freelancers on the online labor platform Upwork: strengthening your profile, promoting your skills, expanding your presence, maintaining client relationships, and individualizing your brand. Even online, good relationships with clients are essential.

Thus, sole proprietors choose freelance work because they “want to work in their own style of work”, and are generally satisfied with their “working relationships” and “working environment (working hours, location, etc.)”. However, although “low and unstable income” is a barrier, 80% of the respondents answered that they “want to continue working as freelancers” in the future. For sole proprietors, human networks are one of the most important factors in starting and continuing a business.

Although sole proprietors have a higher subjective view of health than their or-

ganizational counterparts, they also have lower health literacy. The fact that sole proprietors are less likely to talk about their own suffering and problems is also seen as a problem, and recommendations have been made for risk management related to stress among sole proprietors who are not covered by occupational health. Furthermore, independent self-employed workers have lower subjective productivity and lower levels of happiness and satisfaction, the higher their workerhood (employer-subordinate) is in their relationships with their clients. The abuse of a superior position by business partners also lowers the performance of independent self-employed workers.

This suggests that although sole proprietors and independent self-employed workers seek a free and autonomous working style, they are subject to coercive communication, such as intimidation and pressure, when they have a strong master-servant relationship with their business partners. Furthermore, even if a problem arises with a business partner, the sole proprietor is often forced to accept the other party's demands without reactance or resistance, in consideration of future transactions and freelance activities. In such cases, they are less likely to assert their freedom or resist, and may have no choice but to use the communication method of "sympathy".

On the other hand, looking at the communication skills and qualities required of sole proprietors, it can be inferred that successful sole proprietors use a more straightforward and polite approach, in other words, more frank communication, toward their clients compared to those who work for a company organization. Also, sole proprietors are less likely to use coercive tactics themselves compared to those who work for a company organization. Kikawa [34] for adults in general and Kikawa and Imajo [4]-[6] for college students have found a positive relationship between the use of frank manipulation and life satisfaction.

1.8. Purpose of This Study

This study aimed to clarify the communication styles used by sole proprietors and to examine the relationship between these styles and well-being. Life satisfaction will be taken up as an indicator of well-being and compared to those who work in corporate organizations. Since a job position refers to the totality of work and responsibilities assigned to a person [35], this study also examines job positions in a company organization and sole proprietorships at the same level of job position. The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Sole proprietors will use more "frank manipulation" than employees in corporate organizations.

Hypothesis 2: Sole proprietors will use less "coercive manipulation" than employees in corporate organizations.

Hypothesis 3: Sole proprietors will be less defiant than workers in corporate organizations.

Hypothesis 4: Both sole proprietors and those working in corporate organizations will find that "frank manipulation" increases life satisfaction.

2. Method

2.1. Survey Collaborators

350 monitors (180 males and 170 females) registered with a web-based research firm. Age was $M = 53.54$, $SD = 10.71$, range = 26.0 - 87.0. Job positions were: 150 (48.08%) regular employees, 26 (8.33%) chiefs and section chiefs, 32 (10.26%) managers, 20 (6.41%) department managers, 12 (3.85%) directors and executive officers, 66 (21.15%) sole proprietors, and 6 (1.92%) others.

Characteristics by Job Position

Table 1 shows the age and number of male and female by job position. Although the number of individuals per job position shows some skewness, the number of sole proprietors is relatively high, and the sex ratio is balanced. Therefore, I decided to proceed with the analysis in this category.

Table 1. Characteristics by job position.

Job position	Age		<i>n</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Male	Female
Regular employee (<i>n</i> = 150)	50.48	10.58	62	88
Chief/Section chief (<i>n</i> = 26)	51.31	8.17	14	12
Manager (<i>n</i> = 32)	50.50	6.90	25	7
Department manager (<i>n</i> = 20)	55.10	9.14	17	3
Director/Executive officer (<i>n</i> = 12)	63.75	7.58	12	0
Sole proprietor (<i>n</i> = 66)	58.82	10.18	38	28
Others (<i>n</i> = 6)	53.83	14.22	3	3

It should be noted that sole proprietors are representatives in terms of organizational hierarchy, but in terms of employment status, they are individuals who conduct business on their own. Unlike company employees, they do not have fixed quotas or minimum wages, and their remuneration is determined based on the results of their work and the terms of their contracts. In this way, sole proprietors are unique entities that differ from company employees, but they can be regarded as a single occupational status. Therefore, in this study, I will compare and examine sole proprietors as a single occupational status in the workplace.

2.2. Survey Period

The survey was conducted in April 2023.

2.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of the following items.

1) Face Sheet Items

Age, sex, marital status, and job position were inquired about.

2) Interpersonal Manipulation in Daily Life

A total of 51 items from the Interpersonal Manipulation in Daily Life Scale (expanded version) developed by Kikawa and Imajo [6] were used. The rating scale was a 7-point scale, ranging from “1—not at all applicable” to “7—very applicable”.

3) Psychological Reactance

I used the Japanese version (28 items) of the Treatment Reactance Scale [14] by Imajo [36]. The subscales were: “non-sympathy” (9 items), “insistence for freedom” (9 items), and “defiance” (10 items). The rating scale was a four-point scale: 1—never - 4—often.

4) Life Satisfaction

The Japanese version of the Life Satisfaction Scale [18] by Oishi [16] was used (5 items in total). A 7-point scale was used, with 1—being not at all applicable and 7—being very applicable.

2.4. Survey Procedure

The survey was conducted through a web-based research company (NTT.com Online).

3. Results

3.1. Scale Composition

1) Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Manipulation Tactics Scale

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the Manipulation Tactics Scale for daily life ($\chi^2(431) = 1581.22, p < .001, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .86$). The fit was judged acceptable. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are shown in **Table 2**. The Cronbach’s α coefficients were .96, .94, and .85, respectively. The three-factor structure has also been confirmed by Kikawa and Imajo [4]-[6].

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis of manipulation tactics scales.

	F1	F2	F3
Coercive manipulation ($\alpha = .96$)			
32 I force my opinion on others by saying, “You have to do it this way”.	.90		
37 I ignore the person until he/she does what I want him/her to do.	.87		
40 I threaten that if you don’t do as I say, something terrible will happen.	.86		
22 In order to make that happen, I will not hesitate to use intimidation.	.86		
51 I scold them for doing as they are told.	.86		
28 I yell, “I want you to do this!”	.86		
44 I take a sulky attitude until he/she does as I say.	.84		
18 I treat him/her coldly until he/she does as I say.	.83		
46 I tell him/her that if he/she doesn’t do it, everyone will criticize him/her.	.82		
31 To make that happen, I cry and beg.	.80		

Continued

Deceptive manipulation ($\alpha = .94$)				
21	I ask a third party in a higher position to ask the other party to do so.		.81	
24	Not only myself, I have various other people encourage him/her to do so.		.78	
35	I motivate him/her by referring to other people.		.74	
6	I research the other party's background in advance and devise a way to make my request difficult to refuse.		.74	
29	I make preparations in advance and work together to persuade the person to take action.		.73	
15	In order to get him/her to do that, I praise him/her as being capable and suitable for the job.		.73	
12	I make a deal by showing the conditions for doing so.		.73	
20	To make that happen, I keep him/her happy.		.71	
8	I lie that important people (such as family members and bosses) want you to do so.		.71	
16	To achieve this, I complained about my difficult situation and sought sympathy.		.71	
3	I come up with various strategies to get the other party to do what I want them to do.		.68	
9	I offer a reward and ask for a favor.		.68	
34	To make that happen, I take a humble stance.		.65	
2	I say a false reason to him/her do so.		.64	
5	To make that happen, I hide anything that might be inconvenient.		.60	
Frank manipulation ($\alpha = .85$)				
7	I take sincerely about what I want.		.77	
10	I honestly express my appreciation for his/her efforts.		.76	
4	If there is something I don't want to do, I tell him/her frankly.		.74	
1	If there is something I want to do, I tell him/her frankly.		.67	
25	I explain why I don't want him/her to do that.		.64	
45	I explain why I want him/her to do that.		.61	
Intercorrelation		F1	F2	F3
F1		—	.68	-.24
F2			—	.13

Note: This study, Kikawa [13] and Kikawa [34] were conducted as part of the same survey, but they are independent studies with different objectives and hypotheses. The results of the exploratory factor analysis of manipulation tactics scale have already been published in Kikawa [34].

2) Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Reactance Scale

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed on reactance [13], but the fit was not acceptable ($\chi^2(350) = 2048.53$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .12, CFI = .62). However, following the factor structure of previous studies, I decided to continue the analysis as is. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are shown in Table 3. The raw scores of each item were summed to obtain the subscale scores (α ranged from .78 to .86).

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis of reactance scales.

		F1	F2	F3
Non-sympathy ($\alpha = .78$)				
18	I often follow what people tell me to do. (*)	.77		
21	I accept the ideas that other people give me in order to solve my problems. (*)	.76		
25	I often follow advice from others. (*)	.74		
24	Even if the reason is unclear, doing something for others is not difficult. (*)	.67		
13	Even if my friends want to do something else and I have to change my plans, I don't get irritated. (*)	.62		
28	I think it is very important to get along well with the people around you (friends, colleagues, etc.). (*)	.54		
16	When someone asks me for a favor, I think carefully about what their true intentions are.	.35		
7	When I engage in debate, I am easily persuaded. (*)	.35		
27	I am very stubborn and push through things my own way.	.10		
Insistence for freedom ($\alpha = .79$)				
26	I would rather express my opinion based on my beliefs than remain silent.		.72	
9	I want to be able to do what I want to do more freely in my work and studies.		.68	
19	If anything, I tend to insist that my opinion is correct.		.68	
5	I sincerely want to cherish my personal freedom.		.61	
15	It's interesting to debate opinions.		.54	
8	When the discussion gets heated, I forget myself and get carried away.		.52	
20	I think it is important to be in a position of influence.		.51	
1	If the food that comes out is cold, I will point it out to the restaurant staff.		.39	
11	Sometimes I am too afraid to disagree with other people's opinions. (*)		.25	
Defiance ($\alpha = .86$)				
10	When I am given various instructions, I often end up doing the opposite.			.83
4	I feel good when other people do things that are forbidden.			.76
6	It's fun to be contrary.			.72
17	I can't stand it when people try to persuade me.			.68
2	I get annoyed when people in authority (such as teachers and bosses) give me orders.			.68
22	It's fun to point out the mistakes of people who think they are right in front of others.			.68
12	It's annoying when police officers give orders left and right.			.66
23	I think I am more competitive than cooperative.			.61
3	I often find myself doubting whether what important people say is true.			.51
14	I don't mind being told what to do. (*)			.11
Intercorrelation		F1	F2	F3
F1		—	.80	.45
F2			—	.67

Note: *Indicates a reversal item.

3) Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Life Satisfaction

A confirmatory factor analysis of life satisfaction was conducted, but the fit was not acceptable ($\chi^2(4) = 35.41, p < .001, RMSEA = .15, CFI = .98$). However, following the factor structure of previous studies, the analysis was continued as is. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are shown in **Table 4**. The raw scores of all items were summed to obtain the scale score. The α coefficient for the life satisfaction scale was .94.

The basic statistics for each variable by job positions are shown in **Table 5**.

Table 4. Confirmatory factor analysis of life satisfaction.

		F1
Life satisfaction ($\alpha = .94$)		
3	I am satisfied with my life.	.93
2	The conditions of my life are excellent.	.91
1	In most ways my life is close to my ideal.	.90
4	So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.	.86
5	If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	.75

Table 5. Basic statistics for each variable by job position.

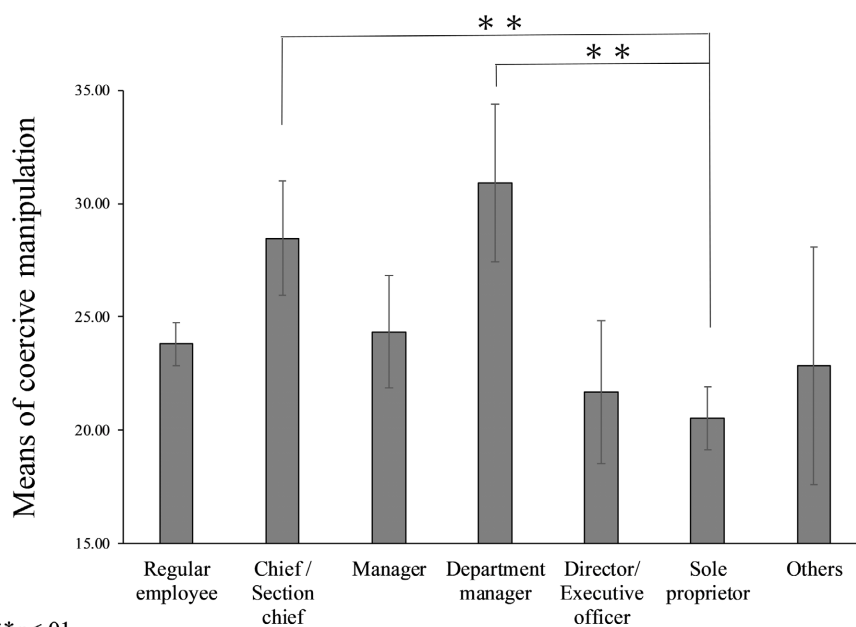
	Regular employee ($n = 150$)		Chief/Section chief ($n = 26$)		Manager ($n = 32$)		Department manager ($n = 20$)		Director/Executive officer ($n = 12$)		Sole proprietor ($n = 66$)		Others ($n = 6$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Manipulation tactics														
Coercive manipulation	23.79	11.52	28.46	12.85	24.34	14.12	30.90	15.57	21.67	10.91	20.53	11.41	22.83	12.80
Deceptive manipulation	50.27	14.90	52.04	12.19	53.53	15.68	57.75	18.62	54.75	8.23	47.44	15.89	52.83	9.72
Frank manipulation	27.27	5.46	27.42	5.69	27.25	6.53	29.85	6.22	30.75	4.52	29.24	6.03	27.67	5.16
Psychological reactance														
Non-sympathy	26.50	3.67	26.65	4.63	27.69	5.78	27.25	3.26	26.58	3.40	26.76	4.23	24.83	2.86
Insistence for freedom	26.06	5.11	26.50	4.59	25.97	5.93	29.75	5.20	29.58	4.78	28.52	4.65	27.50	3.33
Defiance	25.02	5.69	24.81	7.46	24.94	8.99	27.80	6.07	26.25	6.52	25.41	6.03	22.67	6.38
Life satisfaction	17.33	6.77	18.15	6.06	16.97	7.99	18.75	6.06	22.00	6.55	17.14	6.33	17.83	4.17

3.2. Differences in Communication Style by Job Position

1) Differences in Manipulative Communication by Job Position

A one-factor analysis of variance was conducted to identify differences in the mean of each manipulative communication score by position. Levene's test assumed equal variance for all subscales. The main effect of the factor was significant for "coercive manipulation" ($F(6, 305) = 2.63, p = .017, \eta_p^2 = .049$) (**Figure 1**). Mul-

multiple comparisons (Holm) revealed a significant difference between the chiefs/section chiefs and sole proprietors, with sole proprietors having lower “coercive manipulation” scores than the chiefs/section chiefs ($p = .005$, $d = .648$). There was also a significant difference between department managers and sole proprietors, with sole proprietors having lower “coercive manipulation” scores than department managers ($p = .001$, $d = .848$). For the “deceptive manipulation”, there was no main effect of the factor ($F(6, 305) = 1.66$, $p = .130$, $\eta_p^2 = .032$). For the “frank manipulation”, there was a significant trend toward a main effect of the factor ($F(6, 305) = 1.87$, $p = .086$, $\eta_p^2 = .035$), but multiple comparisons (Holm) revealed no significant differences between any of the positions.



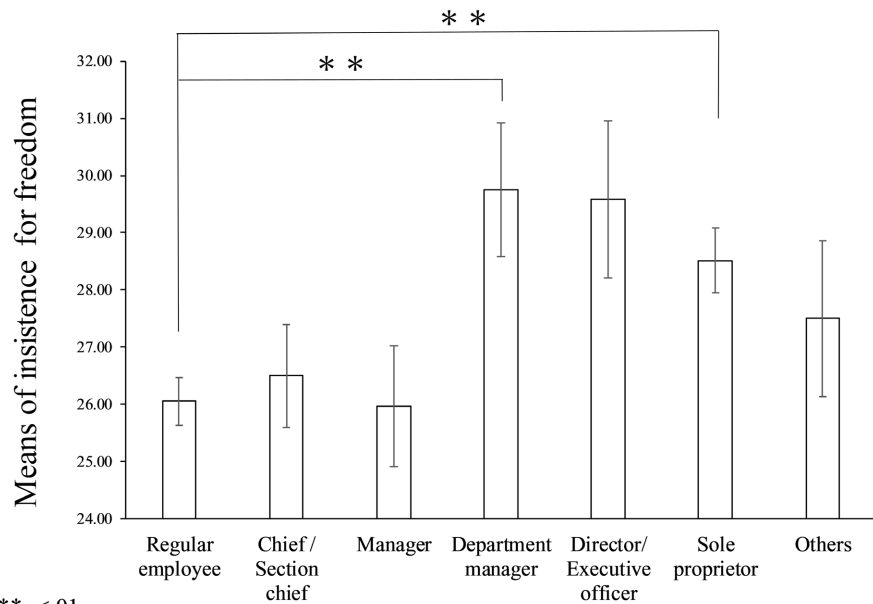
** $p < .01$

Note. Error bars represent standard errors.

Figure 1. Means of coercive manipulation by job position.

2) Differences in Reactance by Job Position

A one-factor analysis of variance was conducted to identify differences in the mean of each reactance score by job position. Levene’s test assumed equal variance for “non-sympathy” and “insistence for freedom”. Since Levene’s test did not assume equal variance for “defiance”, Welch’s test was used. No factor main effect was found for “non-sympathy” ($F(6, 305) = .64$, ns , $\eta_p^2 = .012$). A main effect of the factor was significant for “insistence for freedom” ($F(6, 305) = 3.67$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .067$) (**Figure 2**). Multiple comparisons (Holm) revealed a significant difference between regular employees and department managers, with department manager having higher “insistence for freedom” scores than regular employees ($p = .002$, $d = .730$). Significant differences were also found between regular employees and sole proprietors, with sole proprietors having higher “insistence for freedom” scores than general employees ($p = .001$, $d = .486$). No main effect of factor was found for “defiance” ($F(6, 40.07) = .80$, ns , $\eta_p^2 = .016$).



** $p < .01$

Note. Error bars represent standard errors.

Figure 2. Means of insistence for freedom by job position.

3) Differences in Life Satisfaction by Job Position

A one-factor analysis of variance was conducted to identify differences in mean life satisfaction scores by job position. Levene's test assumed equal variance. However, no main effect of factor was found ($F(6, 305) = 1.14, ns, \eta_p^2 = .022$).

3.3. The Effects of the Manipulations on Manipulators' Life Satisfaction (Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis)

Since the number of survey participants in this study was unevenly distributed by position, a total of 64 organizational managers, including managers, department managers, and directors/executive officers, were selected for future analysis, and 66 sole proprietors were compared with them.

1) The Effects of the Manipulations on Manipulators' Life Satisfaction, in Organizational Management Positions (Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis)

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with manipulation tactics used in organizational management roles as independent variables and life satisfaction as the dependent variable, examining changes in the coefficient of determination (R^2). Sex dummy variables were used as covariates. The explanatory variables were set as follows: "coercive manipulation" (the easiest manipulation) in Step 1, "deceptive manipulation" (a more complex manipulation) in Step 2, "frank manipulation" (the most desirable manipulation) in Step 3, coercive \times sex dummy in Step 4, deceptive \times sex dummy in Step 5, and frank \times sex dummy in Step 6. The determination coefficients (R^2) were, respectively, .01, .12, .23, .23, .24, .24. Significant increases in the coefficient of determination (R^2) were observed in Steps 2 and 3. In Step 2, the effect of "deceptive manipulation" was strong ($\beta = .422, p = .007$), while in Step 3, the effect of "frank manipulation" was strong ($\beta = .373, p = .004$).

Furthermore, in Steps 5 and 6, values exceeding 10 were also observed for VIF (Table 6).

Table 6. Results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis with life satisfaction as the dependent variable among organizational managers.

Explanatory variable	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95%CI	VIF
Step 1							
Coercive manipulation	.05	.07	.10	.79	.43	[-.08, .18]	1.00
<i>R</i> = .10, ΔR^2 = .01							
Step 2							
Coercive manipulation	-.08	.08	-.16	-1.05	.30	[-.24, .07]	1.62
Deceptive manipulation	.20	.07	.42	2.77	.01	[.06, .34]	1.62
<i>R</i> = .35, ΔR^2 = .12**							
Step 3							
Coercive manipulation	-.01	.08	-.01	-.06	.95	[-.16, .15]	1.82
Deceptive manipulation	.10	.08	.22	1.36	.18	[-.05, .25]	1.99
Frank manipulation	.44	.15	.37	2.97	.00	[.14, .74]	1.24
<i>R</i> = .48, ΔR^2 = .23**							
Step 4							
Coercive manipulation	.03	.18	.05	.15	.88	[-.33, .39]	9.47
Deceptive manipulation	.10	.08	.22	1.36	.18	[-.05, .26]	2.00
Frank manipulation	.44	.15	.37	2.91	.01	[.14, .74]	1.25
Coercive * Sex	-.03	.15	-.07	-.20	.85	[-.33, .27]	8.97
<i>R</i> = .48, ΔR^2 = .23							
Step 5							
Coercive manipulation	.14	.45	.28	.32	.75	[-.76, 1.04]	58.39
Deceptive manipulation	.07	.14	.15	.48	.64	[-.22, .36]	7.04
Frank manipulation	.44	.15	.37	2.90	.01	[.14, .74]	1.25
Coercive * Sex	-.15	.46	-.35	-.33	.74	[-1.07, .77]	84.34
Deceptive * Sex	.04	.15	.14	.29	.78	[-.26, .35]	19.31
<i>R</i> = .48, ΔR^2 = .24							
Step 6							
Coercive manipulation	.12	.47	.23	.26	.80	[-.81, 1.05]	61.60
Deceptive manipulation	.05	.16	.11	.34	.74	[-.26, .37]	8.40
Frank manipulation	.48	.25	.41	1.97	.05	[-.01, .98]	3.25
Coercive * Sex	-.13	.47	-.30	-.28	.78	[-1.08, .81]	87.50
Deceptive * Sex	.07	.19	.23	.37	.72	[-.31, .45]	30.11
Frank * Sex	-.06	.25	-.09	-.23	.82	[-.55, .44]	12.14
<i>R</i> = .49, ΔR^2 = .24							

***p* < .01.

2) The Effects of the Manipulations on Manipulators' Life Satisfaction in Sole Proprietors (Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis)

Similarly, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted for the group of sole proprietors to examine changes in the coefficient of determination (R^2). The R^2 values were .00, .01, .13, .13, .14, and .14, respectively. In Step 3, a significant increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2) was observed, indicating a strong influence of "frank manipulation" ($\beta = .383$, $p = .003$). Furthermore, in Steps 5 and 6, values exceeding 10 were also observed for VIF (Table 7).

Table 7. Results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis with life satisfaction as the dependent variable among sole proprietors.

Explanatory variable	B	SE	β	t	p	95%CI	VIF
Step 1							
Coercive manipulation	.00	.07	.01	.06	.96	[-.14, .14]	1.00
$R = .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .00$							
Step 2							
Coercive manipulation	-.04	.10	-.06	-.35	.73	[-.24, .17]	2.08
Deceptive manipulation	.04	.07	.10	.54	.59	[-.11, .18]	2.08
$R = .07$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$							
Step 3							
Coercive manipulation	.07	.10	.12	.66	.51	[-.13, .27]	2.34
Deceptive manipulation	-.03	.07	-.08	-.43	.67	[-.17, .11]	2.32
Frank manipulation	.40	.13	.38	3.04	.00	[.14, .67]	1.14
$R = .37$, $\Delta R^2 = .13^{**}$							
Step 4							
Coercive manipulation	.07	.11	.13	.63	.53	[-.16, .30]	2.91
Deceptive manipulation	-.03	.07	-.08	-.42	.68	[-.18, .11]	2.32
Frank manipulation	.40	.13	.38	3.01	.00	[.14, .67]	1.14
Coercive * Sex	-.01	.07	-.01	-.09	.93	[-.14, .13]	1.65
$R = .37$, $\Delta R^2 = .13$							
Step 5							
Coercive manipulation	.13	.15	.23	.86	.39	[-.17, .42]	4.95
Deceptive manipulation	-.06	.08	-.14	-.66	.51	[-.22, .11]	3.03
Frank manipulation	.42	.14	.40	3.05	.00	[.15, .70]	1.22
Coercive * Sex	-.12	.20	-.27	-.60	.55	[-.53, .28]	14.45
Deceptive * Sex	.06	.09	.24	.60	.55	[-.13, .24]	11.36
$R = .37$, $\Delta R^2 = .14$							
Step 6							
Coercive manipulation	.14	.15	.26	.94	.35	[-.16, .45]	5.16

Continued

Deceptive manipulation	-.09	.11	-.22	-.83	.41	[-.30, .12]	4.76
Frank manipulation	.46	.16	.44	2.88	.01	[.14, .79]	1.62
Coercive * Sex	-.15	.21	-.34	-.71	.48	[-.57, .27]	15.63
Deceptive * Sex	.11	.15	.49	.77	.45	[-.18, .41]	27.78
Frank * Sex	-.08	.15	-.18	-.50	.62	[-.39, .23]	9.06
$R = .38, \Delta R^2 = .14$							

** $p < .01$.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to clarify the communication styles used by sole proprietors and to examine the relationship between these styles and well-being in comparison to employees in corporate organizations.

4.1. Communication Styles Used by Sole Proprietors

The results showed that the sole proprietors were less likely to use “coercive manipulation” than chiefs/section chiefs or department managers (Hypothesis 2 supported). In addition to the fact that sole proprietors do not have subordinates who can be subjected to “coercive manipulation”, their autonomous work style makes them less likely to use such manipulation themselves, except in special cases.

There were no differences by job position in “deceptive” and “frank manipulation” (Hypothesis 1 is not supported). Since sole proprietors are required to have the ability and skill to explain things in an easy-to-understand manner in order to obtain work, I expected that they would use more “frank manipulation” than those who work in a company organization, but this hypothesis was not supported.

Sole proprietors, like department managers, were also shown to make more “insistence for freedom” than regular employees (Hypothesis 3 is not supported). A freelancer is “an independent form of person who does not work exclusively for a specific company, group, or organization and who receives compensation for offering his or her expertise and skills” [37], and is solely a person who receives compensation for his or her results. This study showed that sole proprietors insist more on their freedom than regular employees, and that they insist on what they should insist. However, the situations and circumstances in which they insist were not examined in this study, and it is a future issue to examine the partners and situations in which sole proprietors insist on their freedom.

4.2. The Effects of the Sole Proprietors’ Manipulation on Their Own Life Satisfaction

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed that the use of “deceptive manipulation” was positively associated with the life satisfaction of organizational managers, whereas the use of “frank manipulation” was positively associated with the life satisfaction of sole proprietors. However, for both organizational managers working

in corporate organizations and sole proprietors, the use of “frank manipulation” was positively associated with life satisfaction, thus supporting Hypothesis 4.

In Machiavellianism, which derives from the medieval Italian statesman Machiavelli’s book “The Theory of Monarchs”, it is said that a monarch is willing to use means such as lies and trickery to achieve his goals, and deception is the heart of a monarch [38]. Similarly, in a corporate organization, even if a company uses intrigue, such as lying about its reasons or taking the low road, if it succeeds, it will be able to position itself in a relatively superior position within the organization and gain a certain degree of satisfaction. However, a sole proprietor is a person who is rewarded for his or her accomplishments, thereby enhancing his or her own career and market value. The results of this study showed that it is not possible to gain credibility as an individual freelancer by making up for the situation or making a makeshift deal, as in the case of “deceptive manipulation”. Organizational managers and sole proprietors require different interpersonal manipulation, so it is likely that “deceptive manipulation” and “frank manipulation” have different effects on life satisfaction.

4.3. Desirability of “Frank Manipulation”

According to Lancers [39], a sole proprietor who can continue to obtain work is one who recognizes the importance of communication in business and values human connections. A sole proprietorship is only possible with customers and clients, and no matter how passionate one is about one’s work, one must be able to communicate the details of that work to others. In addition to being polite, prompt, and humble, responding to others in a way that is sensitive to their feelings will lead to stronger relationships of trust [39].

The trust relationships cultivated in this way can quickly expand the possibility of continued requests and new client referrals, and the communication skills of a sole proprietor can be an important asset, having a positive impact on future work [39]. Today, the importance of psychological safety [40] is also gaining attention in corporate organizations. Psychological safety refers to an environment in the workplace where members are allowed to frankly express their opinions and take risks to challenge each other without fear of criticism or punishment. As a key concept for organizational growth and innovation, it is attracting attention not only in companies but also in various organizations, such as healthcare and government. This study also showed that “frank communication” is desirable in work environments. However, this study is based on a single questionnaire survey, and there are limitations in clarifying the causal relationships between variables. Furthermore, since the responses are self-reported, social desirability may have influenced them. In addition, it cannot be denied that communication styles are also influenced by cultural differences.

4.4. Well-Being of Sole Proprietors

The Laboratory of Occupational Health Management at the University of Occu-

pational and Environmental Health [26] pointed out the following points in the discussion of ensuring the health of sole proprietors: 1) where to place individual responsibility, 2) even if individual responsibility is assumed, support is needed for information transfer and skill acquisition, and 3) some support is also needed for improving individual health behaviors.

According to the Freelance Association [37], freelance jobs are becoming increasingly diverse now that it is possible to easily take on work with a single smartphone, and freelancers face the challenges of dealing with work-related problems, work-related risks, and life and health risks. Until now, there has been a strong “self-responsibility” attitude toward freelance work, and freelancers have been described as “the chosen ones”. From now on, however, the goal is to realize “a world where everyone can build an autonomous career”. In order for everyone, including sole proprietors, to be able to work autonomously, it will be effective to sometimes “insist on freedom” and use “frank communication” in daily life. Future work includes further examination of communication styles that enhance well-being in terms of the workplace.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on the psychological aspects of sole proprietors, which have not been the focus of previous research. Previous studies have shown that many sole proprietors are satisfied with their freelance work style, but it has also become clear that sole proprietors face unique mental health issues. The results of the questionnaire survey showed that sole proprietors used less “coercive manipulation” than chiefs/section chiefs or department managers. Additionally, both sole proprietors and department managers exhibited more “insistence for freedom” than regular employees. Furthermore, the use of “deceptive manipulation” was associated positively with the life satisfaction of organizational managers, whereas the use of “frank manipulation” was associated positively with the life satisfaction of sole proprietors.

Data Sharing/Availability Statement

Due to the nature of this research, participants in this study did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available.

Ethical Considerations

At the time, ethical review was not required for conducting research at the institution to which I belonged, so I did not undergo ethical review before starting the survey. However, after collecting the survey data, I applied for ethical review at my current institution, Nagoya Sangyo University, to confirm that there were no ethical issues with publishing and submitting the data, and the ethical review committee approved it (April 12, 2024).

The survey was conducted through the web survey company “NTT Com Online Marketing Solutions Co., Ltd.”. Participants were informed that participation in

the survey was voluntary, and only those who gave their consent were asked to respond anonymously. Responding to the questions was considered consent. No compensation was provided for survey participants by the researchers, but compensation from the web survey company was provided in accordance with their regulations. The electronic data of the responses are stored on a password-protected PC and USB memory.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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